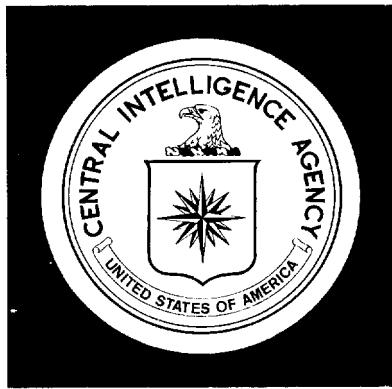


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USSR - CHINA - SOUTHEAST ASIA: Increased Soviet attention to Chinese activity in Southeast Asia over the past few months reflects Moscow's interest in forestalling significant improvement in Peking's relations with its southern neighbors. Moscow may also be concerned that the Chinese seizure of the Paracel Islands is evidence of an understanding between Peking and Washington regarding the region.

The Paracels episode also plays on the Soviets' long-standing sensitivity to any evidence that the Chinese may be assuming a more aggressive posture. The Soviets in recent months have shown particular interest in the Burmese border area where Chinese-supported insurgents have been active.

Moscow's propaganda mill has been using the Paracels incident and Chinese support for insurgents in Burma to exploit traditional distrust of the Chinese in South and Southeast Asia.

On March 1, a long Pravda article traced the Chinese role in Burma, and on March 21 the paper replayed Western press reports that Peking had moved several thousand more of its troops into northeast Burma. China has responded with a People's Daily article claiming Moscow has for years been attempting to "establish hegemony" in Southeast Asia; the area may become a focus of further propaganda exchanges.

Moscow's anti-Chinese propaganda is symptomatic of an underlying concern that Peking's efforts to increase its influence in South and Southeast Asia are being abetted by its relationship with the US.

Moscow has also publicly charged that such collusion has taken place in northern Burma, and has argued that Peking's mild reaction to the Diego Garcia base issue indicates that Peking favors an expanded US naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Moscow is, moreover, almost certainly aware that China's efforts to improve relations with its neighbors to the south have begun to bear fruit.

Thai officials have announced that the cabinet on March 20 recommended lifting a ban on importation of Chinese goods, adding that negotiations would begin soon on a formal Sino-Thai trade agreement.

NORTH VIETNAM: An authoritative article by Vice Premier Le Thanh Nghi reinforces earlier signs that reconstruction and development of North Vietnam, rather than the struggle in the South, will receive priority for the next couple of years.

The article, published on March 14, was designed to explain to cadre the decisions of the 22nd Central Committee plenum held earlier this year. Nghi's article stated that the North's "key task" at present is to rebuild and industrialize the economy. With unusual bluntness, Nghi asserted that the North "should not be too bent on maintaining vigilance and making preparations for war," lest the reconstruction effort suffer. He indicated at more than one point that this will be the line through 1974 and 1975.

Nghi emphasized that Hanoi remains as committed as ever to the southern struggle, but he claimed that North Vietnam can best fulfill its revolutionary duties at this time by building its own economic strength. This theme was stressed by party leader Le Duan last spring, but pronouncements over the last few months have fuzzed the issue. Nghi did not rule out the possibility that once North Vietnam has achieved a degree of economic strength--and perhaps also once it has completed its current effort to improve and modernize the armed forces--it will attempt another major military move in the South.

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ETHIOPIA: The new government and the military appear to be attacking problems inherited from the previous regime and coping effectively with continuing threats to authority.

Prime Minister Endalkatchew this week announced the names of the members of a conference to liberalize the constitution. The 30 members, who come from modern and traditional elements of Ethiopian society, include imperial advisers, judges, academicians, businessmen, and members of parliament, as well as figures from the large Muslim community. The conference will have six months to revise the 1955 constitution to provide for parliamentary supremacy.

The Prime Minister has also filled the important post of finance minister, thus nearly completing a cabinet that is an improvement over its predecessors. In an attempt to deal with the serious drought and famine, the new government has assigned troops and military vehicles to facilitate the distribution of relief supplies. Although teachers and students at Haile Selassie I University are still on strike, the public school teachers' association has agreed to send its members back to work, and secondary schools in the capital appear to be functioning again.

The army seems to be operating effectively. It put down an uprising by military orderlies at the Harrar Military Academy this week.

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Nonetheless, the government is still faced with serious problems. It must find a way to provide for the raises the Emperor promised the military and some civilians without adding to inflationary pressures and social discontent. Other groups--such as civil servants and farm workers--are already clamoring for raises that the government would be hard pressed to provide.

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Unrest has also spread to rural areas. Police reinforcements were sent this week to the area south of the capital, where Galla tribesmen, probably encouraged by the recent unrest in Addis Ababa and other cities, burned farms, killed livestock, and engaged in general destruction.

In addition to these challenges, the new government is still faced with an uneasy relationship with the military dissidents who brought down the last government and wrested major concessions from the Emperor. The military appears inclined to give the new government a chance, but they reportedly have threatened to intervene again if the government fails to live up to its promises.

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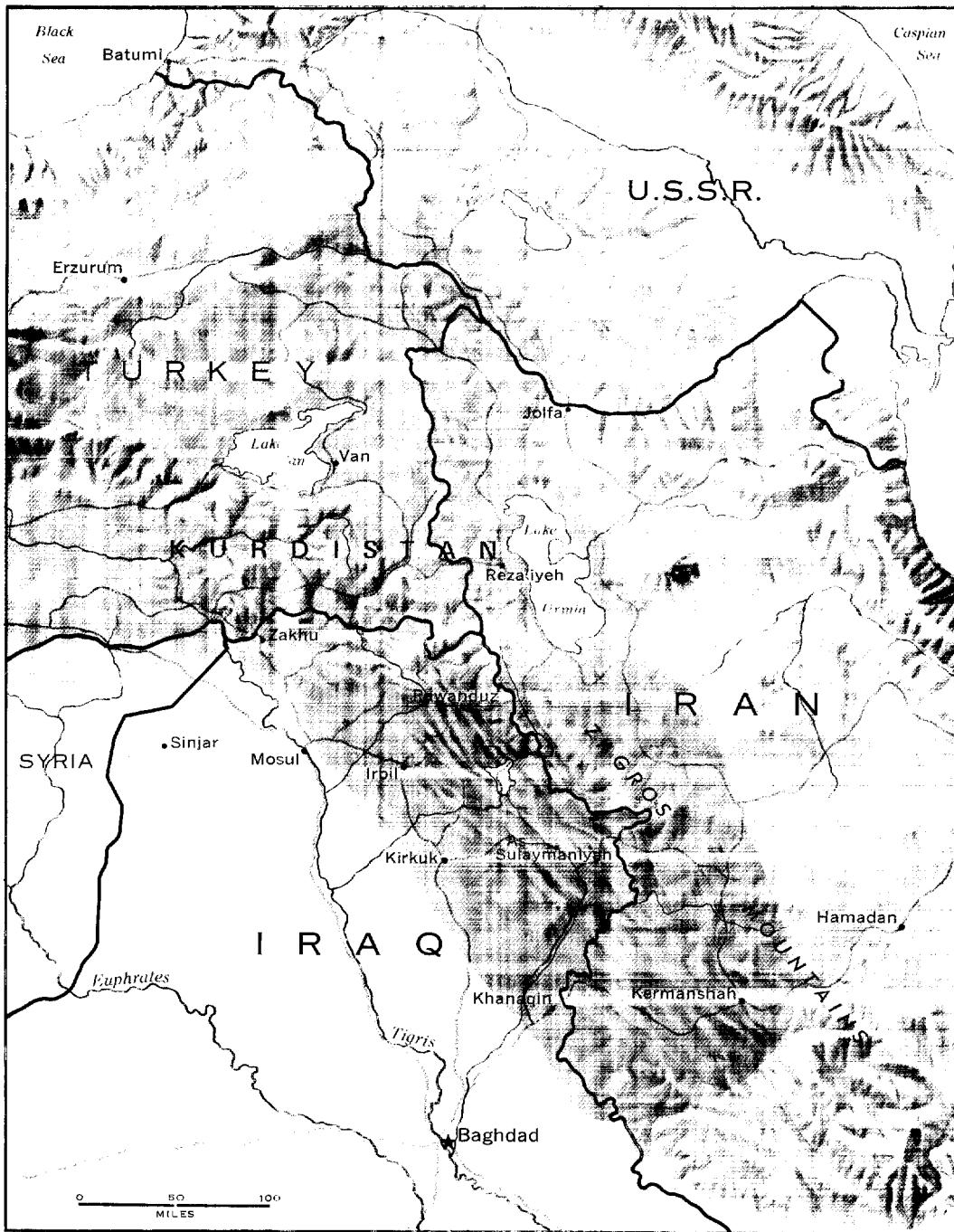
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IRAQ: Both the government and the Kurds are making preparations for possible widespread fighting in the near future. Baghdad has given the Kurds until March 26 to accept the plan for limited Kurdish autonomy that it decreed last week after the breakdown of negotiations with Kurdish leader Barzani. The Kurds' clandestine radio has broadcast denunciations of the government's terms.

Reports persist of attempts to reopen talks between the two sides, but no progress appears to have been made so far in resolving the impasse. Kurdish spokesmen have denied earlier reports that Barzani had informed his military leaders and branches of his Kurdish Democratic Party that a new agreement was being worked out.

Government forces are poised in strength around the Kurdish-inhabited region, but they have not attempted to regain control of key points along the mountainous 200-mile border with Turkey that were seized by the Kurds last week.

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Meanwhile, the government is continuing to clear Kurdish civilians out of sensitive areas.

Before launching any major offensive, Baghdad may first try to implement its autonomy plan by establishing a puppet administration in the autonomous region that is to be allotted to the Kurds. Such a move, however, would be strongly opposed by most Kurds.

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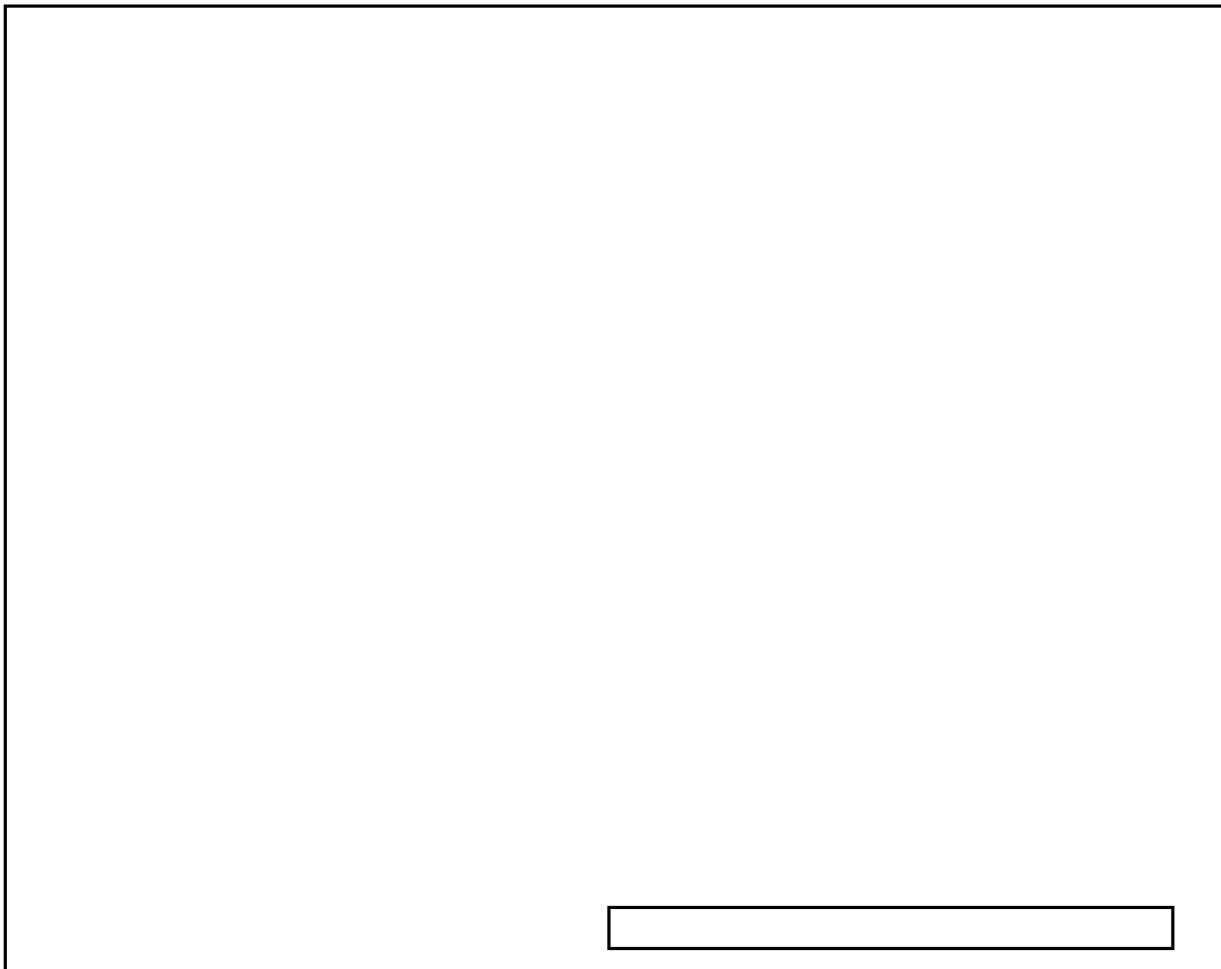
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JAPAN: Prime Minister Tanaka is thinking of visiting Australia, Canada, Mexico, and possibly New Zealand and Burma this fall. There is also some speculation in Tokyo that he will undertake a Latin American tour early in 1975. Tanaka will focus on economic matters, including resource development, in his travels. Most significant, perhaps, would be further discussion with the Canadians of projects for exploitation of the oil sand deposits of Alberta.

Leakage of Tanaka's travel plans at this early date is probably intended to demonstrate that he still expects to be prime minister after this summer's upper house elections. [redacted]

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